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ABSTRACT

Olympic View Middle School has established a program designed to stimulate interest in foreign languages and cultures. The course is intended as an introduction to foreign language and culture study, and is required for all 7th and 8th grade students. Program 1 of the course is taught during one semester of 7th grade, Program 2 during one semester of 8th grade. Program 1 consists of the following: (1) an introduction to language and the origins of language, with attention to Sumer and Phoenicia; (2) a study of the contributions of Latin and Greek to English; (3) a study of the development of English from Old and Middle English; (4) an introduction to four modern languages: Spanish, French, German, and Russian; and (5) special projects and field trips. Program 2 centers on the study of cultures, including mythology of the Greek, Roman, Far Eastern, African, Middle Eastern, Nordic, Celtic, Slavic, East European, Latin American, and North American peoples. Ethnic Literature in the United States is examined, followed by exposure to three languages in situational settings, such as eating, travel, and other leisure activities. Careers in foreign language-related fields are discussed, with cultural activities rounding off the program. This program has resulted in increased desire on the part of students to learn more about foreign languages and cultures. An outline is attached for Programs 1 and 2. (AM)

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INTRODUCTION TO FOREIGN LANGUAGES AND CULTURES: A NEW COURSE TO STIMULATE SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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WAFLT Forum

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

by

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This article should offer a flicker of hope to those of you who have witnessed, as I have, the near death of foreign language instruction and enrollment throughout the country in the public schools. This decline has been helped along in recent years by short-sighted state legislators, who in their haste to placate the demands of a public crying for a return to "basic" education, have seen fit to exclude one area which traditionally has always been one of the basics, namely, foreign language learning. We in Washington State are not immune to this problem, but I will speak to this situation as it applies to us later in my article. In spite of such obstacles, I am pleased to report that in Mukilteo (pronounced muck-ill-tee-o), Washington, there is a program which is trying to bring back an interest in and desire for foreign languages as well as to spark an enthusiasm for ethnic cultures both inside and outside of our borders.

Our program, entitled An Introduction to Foreign Languages and Cultures, is a two year program required for all 7th and 8th graders in our district middle schools. The class is one semester long each year. Program I is taught during the 7th grade and Program II in the 8th grade. Because the nature of the programs presupposes enrollment in Program I before Program II, all 7th and 8th grade students are taking the first year course this year. Program II will be implemented at the beginning of the 1978-1979 school year. Course outlines on page 20 are included for both years.

The course is for all purposes just what the title implies. It is an introductory course to stimulate interest and to provide a background to all students in a second language. Foreign language enrollment had begun to sag in recent years, but not really due to the discipline itself. Great numbers of students were automatically excluded from enrollment because of scheduling conflicts. Past administrators treated the languages with flippancy and often times languages were not given amounts of classtime on par with other subjects. At any rate, with the help of a new curriculum director and the painstaking work of the four instructors, the class was implemented as an attempt to overcome past problems and provide every student with an exposure to second language learning. It is hoped that our course will begin to increase high school enrollment in discrete programs and to impart to our students a basis for learning a second language more fluently in the future. Our motto has been, "Try it, you'll like it!"

The course is divided chronologically into the concepts as outlined in the course syllabus. At the onset of the class a copy of this syllabus

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is provided to each student coupled with a letter to the parents explaining the scope, sequence, and intent of the class.

We begin the class, as the course outline indicates, with readings and discussions centering upon the definitions, varieties, and origins of language. The various onomatopoeic theories of language are presented and debated along with the the divine and evolutionary theories. We strive to show that no one single theory has yet adequately explained the origins and complexities of language. This introductory unity is ended with a study of the foundations of the alphabet and its development from Phonecia and Sumer.

From this point we move into a study of the Hellenic and Roman contributions to language, and specifically to English. The students learn the Greek alphabet, practice common Latin phrases found in English, and memorize and apply Greek and Latin prefixes and suffixes in order to increase their ability to decipher many English words.

Upon completion of Greek and Latin, the course moves into a most interesting section dealing with the development of English and its various stages of evolution. As an example, the students learn to recite the 23rd Psalm in Old English, Middle English, and Modern English. They discover that Old English for us today appears to be a foreign language, and they begin to appreciate the contributions which other languages have made to English. One exercise that we utilize to achieve this goal is the teaching of word etymologies. We have acquired materials which actually make the learning of word etymologies quite enjoyable for the students.

The final and most lengthy part of the course is devoted to the study of modern languages. Our offerings include Spanish, French, German, and Russian. It is the inclusion of Russian which actually precipitated this article, for as most readers are aware, Russian is not taught as widely throughout the country as are the other above mentioned languages, and it is very rarely found at the middle school level. One of my own personal goals for this course is to give students an opportunity to sample a language using a different alphabet. Cyrillic provides the students with an interesting and exotic change from their own Latin based alphabet. However, enough similarities remain to make the task of studying Cyrillic challenging but not overwhelming.

Glancing through the course outline for Program I, you will notice under item V that the foreign language exposure is limited to the areas listed (greetings and salutations, weather and time expressions, numbers, etc.). Obviously, our aim is not to produce fluent speakers in any of the languages taught, but instead it is an attempt to acquaint <u>all</u> students with the rigors and excitement of learning a second language. In the past language instruction has been restricted to a limited few. Many students, for instance, were prevented from taking a foreign language because they had previously elected to enroll in band which precluded a simultaneous enrollment in a second language. Our hope is to incite an interest toward language learning within as many students as possible.

The variety of activities we employ in class not only provide the students with a base from which they may begin formal language study in the future, but also arouse their enthusiasm to pursue such a study. The following example uses Russian, since it is my major field of expertise, and I feel my readers will be especially interested in how we present it to the students.

Our approach is essentially oral. Students learn common greetings and responses during the first stages of the unit. They are rewarded with Russian pins reading мир, Русские, идут, дружба, when good performance and pronunciation are demonstrated. As the course proceeds selected classroom objects are learned, common questions and appropriate responses are presented and used, and during the course of the entire unit the Cyrillic alphabet is practiced and phased in. Several dialogues are learned and the students present these in skit fashion with conversation partners selected at the beginning of the class. Student made props (i.e. onion dome cupolas, cut-out balalaikas, and scenes in the Siberian wilderness) highlight the presentation of skits.

Coinciding with the Russian language study, aspects of Russian history and culture are also introduced. A field trip is arranged to a local Russian Orthodox Cathedral (St. Nicholas), where the students are guided through iconostasy and other Orthodox artifacts. Following the tour the students are able to use their Russian during an authentically prepared Russian lunch. The members of the church's guild prepare a lunch at minimal cost. A sample menu might include пирожки (piroshki), борщ (borsch), and ватрушка (a Russian dessert). The students spend time before and after the field trip studying the development of Russian Orthodoxy in both pre- and post-revolutionary Russia. This field trip has always been successful. Parents and other interested community leaders often accompany us on the trip as chaperones.

Other cultural activities are somewhat dependent upon time constraints, but we have also taught folk dances (with myself as instructor for the infamous казачок). Once we even assembled a total of 120 students in conjunction with the other Middle School, Explorer, for an international foods cook-off contest. Local VIPs and parents were gathered to serve as judges. Ms. Rosanne Royer, President of the Washington Association of Foreign Language Teachers and wife of Seattle's new mayor, the honorable Charles Royer, also attended as a judge. This activity served as an end of the semester closing project, but it also gave us an opportunity to enlighten the community about second language study.

Careful and coordinated planning are the keys to fitting all of these activities into the relatively short period in which we have the students. We hope to show that learning a foreign language is neither all fun and games nor is it lacking these activities either. It is our purpose to indicate that learning a language does not mean that it is to be used only in the classroom. Nor does it mean that the language can only be spoken in the country or regions to which it is native. One must make the languages relevant and alive if they are to survive in today's school envi-

ronment. We try to point out that the United States has a wealth of ethnic neighborhoods and communities where a plethora of languages are spoken every day. This we teach with pride, which we hope will be transferred to our pupils. We sincerely strive to develop an appreciation for a second tongue and a better understanding of non-English speaking peoples both inside and outside of our borders.

On the last day of class all students are given a chance to critique the class and its content. We found an overwhelming desire on the part of the students to learn more foreign language! Because this is a required class we have both highly motivated and non-motivated students in the classroom. Therefore, in distributing the initial survey we were apprehensive about the results in spite of our strong feelings that the great majority of students throughly enjoyed and benefited from the experience. However, we were more than happily rewarded when we discovered that most not only enjoyed the class and the chance to learn how to speak in another tongue, but many regretted not being able to stay on for another semester to learn how to speak more. Needless to say, these comments were quite encouraging, and we feel that they help to point out that the languages are surely not yet "dead and buried."

In evaluating the results to see how best we could adjust the course to implement some suggestions, we were naturally limited by many pre-existing policies and programs. One desire which we hope to put into practice is the implementation of a discrete language program in addition to the second year portion of our program. We hopefully foresee a modification by which all students are required to take Program I, but those students who by the time they reach the 8th grade have made a decision to formally pursue a language will be able to do so. However, these decisions are to be made in the future. We, the teaching staff, will continue to exert our influence in the hopes that such an end can be realized.

Our course, it is hoped, will not be judged solely upon the quantity of material covered in one term. It is, after all, an introductory course. We hope that more realistically our effectiveness will be evaluated upon the basis of our ability to create a desire and interest within students to learn a second language. Along with myself, Ms. Linda Bauman-Houglum, Ms. Anna Marie Lee, and Ms. Marion Lawliss have develped this program in hopes of renewing and stimulating an excitement about the languages. Many obstacles still block our path, however. Washington State's short sighted, poorly written basic education law is seriously jeopardizing foreign language instruction throughout the state. The law, passed by a recent state legislature, excludes foreign languages from what is considered "basic" education. Some administrators and teachers still look upon foreign languages as a frill. These regressive attitudes and actions certainly increase the problem, but if foreign languages are not only to survive, but to thrive as well, we as foreign language teachers cannot run from the problem. We must face and attack it.

We hope that our attempts are a first step in the battle to recoup the losses which we have suffered during the past decade. The talent, dedication, and tireless work of my colleagues towards this end provides me with the sincere hope that this goal will be achieved.

INTRODUCTION TO FOREIGN LANGUAGES AND FOREIGN CULTURES

COURSE OUTLINE

Program I

I. Introduction to Course

A. What is language?
B. Language - Verbal and Non-verbal
C. Alphabet - written language
D. Foundations of Language (Sumer, Phoenicia, Egypt.)

II. Greek & Roman linguistic and cultural contributions to English

A. Alphabet
B. Numbers
C. Latin and Greek based roots, prefixes, and suffixes
D. Historical contributions

III. Development of the English Language

A. Old English (Anglo-Saxon)
B. Middle English
C. Modern English
D. Linguistic contributions of other cultures to the English language

IV. Spanish / French / German / Russian

Each of the languages will include selections from the following areas:

A. Alphabet
B. Greetings and everyday expressions
C. Numbers
D. Colors
E. Days, Months
F. Seasons, Weather
G. Cognates
H. Travel terms
I. Cultural Explorations (songs, dances, foods, art, literature, holidays, etc.)

(Students will be exposed to three of the above mentioned languages.)

V. Enrichment Projects, Field Trips, etc.

Program II

I. Exploring World Languages and Cultures through Myths, Legends, and Selected Literature

A. What is Mythology?

B. Myths and Legends of the Ancient World

1. Greek
2. Roman
3. Far Eastern
4. African

C. Middle Eastern Literature

D. Myths and Legends of the Western World

1. European
   a. Nordic and Teutonic
   b. Celtic
   c. Slavic and East European

2. American
   a. Latin American and Carribean
   b. North American
      1) Indian
      2) Pioneer
      3) Modern

E. Ethnic Literature in the United States

(Students will be exposed to three of the following languages)

II. Spanish / French / German / Russian

A. Basic Vocabulary Review

B. Conversational Situations

1. School
2. Home
3. Leisure Activities
4. Foods
5. Travel

III. Careers in Foreign Language Related Fields

IV. Cultural Explorations and Enrichment Activities

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